

A publication of the DCFS
Hispanic Advisory Committee

Noticias

Rod R. Blagojevich, Governor
Bryan Samuels, Director

Special Conference Edition, 2003



Welcome from the Chairperson



Victor M. Flores

Bienvenidos!! Welcome to this edition of Noticias. This newsletter is one of a number of vehicles the Hispanic Advisory Committee utilizes to apprise you of Latino Child Welfare issues and practices within DCFS and the community.

The IDCFS Hispanic Advisory Committee was created with the mandate and objective of advising the Director on matters of “provisional services to Hispanic clients provided by the Department and its contractual agencies, relations with the Hispanic community, and Hispanic personnel issues.”

With this in mind, the Committee is addressing a number of issues this fiscal year that will include: transitional services for youth, incarcerated youth, staff retention, hiring of qualified Spanish-speaking staff, and language issues in residential placements.

Working for the Department as bilingual/bicultural workers presents a unique and challenging experience, especially in these times of budget deficits, which challenge our resolve and commitment to deliver quality services to our Latino families. Our workers exemplify commitment:

“Commitment is what transforms a promise into reality. It is the words that speak boldly of your intentions and the actions, which speak louder than the words. It is making the time when there is none. Coming through time after time, year after year. Commitment is the stuff character is made of; the power to change the face of things. It is the daily triumph of integrity over skepticism.”

Author Unknown

I thank you for your great work. Please continue in your quest to empower families to a better quality of life.

Thank you to Maria Ayala and the newsletter subcommittee for all of your hard work in creating this newsletter.

Victor M. Flores
Hispanic Advisory Committee Chairperson

The History and Success of the IDCFS Hispanic Advisory Committee

The Hispanic Advisory Committee has demonstrated its commitment to helping the Latino community access state government and the services it provides, while also serving as an advocate for community concerns and needs.

In the summer of 1988, The Office of the Statewide Coordinator, Senator Miguel Del Valle, and the Chief of Staff suggested the establishment of the Hispanic Advisory Committee. In the fall of 1989, the Director, Gordon Johnson, gave his approval to form a committee to advise his office and the Deputy of Program Operations in a variety of ways.

In 1989, a group of Hispanic Cook County DCFS employees formed a group called “Workers Reaching for Excellence.” This group collaborated with the initial Hispanic Advisory Committee, solidifying the intent to bring Latino issues to the forefront.

After an initial meeting with the Director, the Cook County Regional Administrator and staff from the Governor’s Office, the “DCFS Hispanic Advisory Committee of Cook County” began to take shape. The Committee was given the mandate to advise the Director and the Cook County Regional Administrator in the matters of service provision to Latino clients by DCFS and its contractual agencies, establish and strengthen relations in the Latino community, and address personnel issues involving Latino employees.

In 1990, the Committee adopted a set of bylaws and established its original membership of 19 people, four of whom were employees from private agencies. The Director also appointed two ex-officio, non-voting members. The Committee immediately began drafting a Position Statement to inform the Director of crucial areas of services to the Latino population: compliance with the Burgos Consent Decree, expansion of services to Latino clients, and bilingual personnel issues such as reduced caseloads, promotions, and recruitment.

As part of the Committee’s commitment to its vision of excellence, the agenda for 1991 included broadening the Department’s outreach into the Latino community, and a commitment to hire Latino and bilingual personnel. The priorities of the Committee included the development of Latino foster homes and services, and meeting with executive staff members address these important issues.

The results of the Committee’s perseverance could be seen in several areas. The Director’s office was given

the recommendation to implement written protocol and procedures for dealing with private agencies about licensing, recruitment, and resource development. The Committee and the African-American Advisory Council also united to oppose the centralization of resource development.

In 1992, the Committee became statewide, expanding its membership to include DCFS employees and private agency staff from outside Cook County. Presently there are members on the Committee from all six regions of the state. One of the major issues on the agenda that year was the impending layoff of DCFS employees. The Committee expressed its concern to the current Director, Sue Suter, of the serious ramifications that would be seen by the layoff of recently hired and promoted bilingual staff.

Recruitment of Latinos and other bilingual individuals continued to be a priority for the Committee. The Executive Subcommittee met with the at-that-time Director, Sterling Ryder, to discuss the Department’s plan for hiring new staff, despite the layoffs. The Committee cited the lack of bilingual staff throughout the Department, particularly in the Ombud’s Office (present day Advocacy Office), and called for a departmental plan for the development of additional resources for Latino families. The Committee drafted a “Bilingual Resource Development Policy Statement,” which outlined these recommendations, as well as the Committee’s responsibilities toward the Director’s office.

In response, Director Ryder issued an Action Transmittal which confirmed DCFS’ commitment to the provision of quality bilingual services to all limited/non-English speaking clients.

Throughout the years, the participation of many DCFS and private agency employees on the Hispanic Advisory Committee has contributed to providing a voice for the Latino community within DCFS in an effort to assure quality service provision. As Latino children and their families continue to be involved with the child welfare system, there will remain a demand on our understanding of the impact that the nuances of language and culture have on us all.

Thanks to D. Jean Ortega-Piron and Naida Valdes for their contributions and recollections on the history of the HAC in order to put this article together.

The Birth and Development of the Hispanic Family Conference

The Hispanic Family Conference can be traced back to the original meeting between Senator Miguel Del Valle and his Human Service Committee, and Gordon Johnson, Director of DCFS in the fall of 1988.

The agreement for a conference came as a result of the request made by the Human Service Committee at the first meeting with Gordon Johnson. At that time, Senator Del Valle and the Committee felt there was a need to create a vehicle where staff from DCFS, the private sector and the community at large could come together to discuss, learn and train others about the needs of Latino families and their children.

The original objective was to use the conference as a forum to dialogue and learn about the needs of our families. It was also an opportunity to help develop some direction in terms of how to improve services for families and to showcase the skills and knowledge of Latino practitioners in the field of child welfare and mental health. We took this opportunity to showcase that Latinos knew how to identify the problems our community and families were facing and that we also had the knowledge, the desire and the ability to resolve the problems, if we had first, the opportunity and the funding necessary to put the changes in place, and second, the support to allow drastic changes in the way business was conducted. We started by demonstrating that Latinos at the local and national level had the expertise in both practice and social theory.

The first conference was held in November, 1989. As part of the conference, Senator Del Valle requested the Department prepare a Hispanic Family Profile. The objectives of the profile were to provide written material to the public, to reach out to the community with information about services, to profile the families who were in contact with DCFS, and to provide an analysis of the workforce.

Luis Barrios, Statewide Coordinator of Hispanic Services, spearheaded the planning and implementation of the first conference and received support from the 5th Legislative District Advisory

Committee on Human Services. A Conference Planning Committee brought the successful event to fruition. State Senator Judy Baar Topinka was the first keynote speaker.

One of the key aspects of the continued success of these conferences is the feedback provided by conference attendees. The Planning Committee relies heavily on the information for future planning.

The following themes represent the development of the Conference. See how we have grown:

- Enhancing Public/Private and Community Partnerships to Meet the Needs of the Hispanic Family, 1989
- Delivering Culturally Competent Services for Hispanic Families, 1990
- Hispanic Resource Development and Access to Services, 1991
- Education, Health Care and Youth Employment Services, 1992
- Hispanic Health Care Issues for the '90s, 1993
- Advocacy - Enhancing Child Welfare Services to the Latino Community, 1994
- Beyond the Year 2000: Charting Our Future, 1995
- Maintaining Our Identity: We Stand And Deliver, 1996
- Compadres Somos Todos - Kinship, Community and Beyond, 1997
- A Decade of Opening Hearts and Minds - Abriendo Corazones y Fomentando Conciencia, 1998
- The Hispanic Family Profile: Our Journey Into the New Millennium - Nuestra Jornada al Nuevo Milenio, 1999
- Unsung Heroes Who Strengthen Our Families- Heroes Silenciosos Que Fortalecen Nuestras Familias, 2000
- Best Practice: The Holistic Approach to Serving our Latino Families and Children, 2001
- Celebrating Our Latino Roots: The Family as the Foundation, 2002
- The Latino Community: A Common Language, Diverse Cultures, 2003

Thanks to Luis Barrios and Carol Bean for contributing to this article.

Hispanic Family Conference Photo Album



Meet the New IDCFS Latino Leadership



Petra R. Porras
Chief, Office of Latino Services

Petra R. Porras was the executive director of the Jose Maldonado Children & Family Center, a non-profit agency that specializes in providing family oriented support services to underprivileged children and families in the West Town neighborhood of Chicago. Her responsibilities included Board of Directors recruitment, fundraising, program design, service delivery and management duties. She also served as director of the Children's Home & Aid Society of Illinois' Viva Family Center in West Town where she administered program operations, managed service coordination, oversaw program contracting with state funding agencies, served as liaison to the community and government officials, developed external funding, contracts and engaged in fundraising activities. Petra has held various executive-level positions in the child welfare, mental health and forensic social work arenas, including director of Social Services for Ebony Missionary Baptist Church in the South Central neighborhood of Los Angeles, project director for the South Bronx Community Action Theater's program for intermediate school children involved in the performing arts, director of Children's Home and Aid Society's East Harlem Center, chief of Mental Health Services for Montefiore Hospital's program within the City of New York's Correctional Institute for Men, and director of a medically-supervised day treatment program for substance abusive women and their children in the South Bronx. Petra has held staff positions at Texas Tech University School of Medicine and El Paso Community College in addition to serving as a social worker field placement supervisor for Columbia University in New York City. Petra holds a Master of Science in Social Work from Columbia University in New York City and a Bachelor of Arts degree from Texas Tech University.



Daniel Ibarra-Fitzgerald
Assistant to the Director

Daniel Ibarra-Fitzgerald was the director of programs and services for Casa Central. In that role he was responsible for supervising, monitoring and evaluating program activities and staff for seven programs, as well as the coordination of agency transportation. Under the direction of the president of the agency, he operated a \$4 million budget and managed a staff of 290. Daniel also supervised human service programs, acted as liaison to government agencies and actively participated in the budget program and planning process. Prior to that he was the Program director for Casa Central, where he managed the Intact Family Services unit, providing child and family preservation services to intact family cases through DCFS. He has also held direct service positions at Youth Guidance and De Micco Youth Service. Additionally, he served as a member of Casa Central's continuous Quality Improvement Team where he oversaw policy and procedures and acted as chairperson of the clinical utilization review team where he oversaw policy and procedure, and reviewed clinical files. Daniel holds a Master's degree from the University of Chicago School of Social Service Administration, has completed coursework toward a Master's degree in Business Administration at North Park University and holds a Bachelor's degree in Social Work from Southern Illinois University. He is currently an instructor for the Policies & Strategies for Community Intervention MSW Program at Loyola University Graduate School of Social Work and an instructor of various social service classes at Northeastern Illinois University. Daniel hopes to positively affect as many people as he can before his life ends as well as making a difference and lasting imprint on the Illinois Child Welfare system. Daniel also hopes to be part of a solution that will help the families and children to use their "God given gifts" to be better prepared when they transition out of the system.



Cynthia Moreno

Deputy Director, Service Intervention

Ms. Cynthia Moreno served as the Central Region manager for the Chicago Park District. In that role, she restructured a region that included 126 parks to provide more responsive and effective leisure and recreational activities in diverse and challenged communities. Cynthia has 26 years of professional human service experience in management and direct service settings, including parks and recreation, juvenile probation, emergency services, residential and child welfare programs. She has also served as Child Welfare Division director and Residential Services Division director for Association House of Chicago. Cynthia has held various executive positions for the City of Chicago's Department of Human Services and has served as case manager for the Illinois Department of Corrections. She holds a Bachelor's degree in Liberal Arts from the University of Illinois, a Master's degree in Education from the University of America and has completed a certificate program at John Marshall Law School in Chicago.



Jose Candelas

Associate Deputy Director, Operations

Mr. Jose Candelas joined DCFS in 1998 after working 13 years in direct and management services for bilingual substance abuse and mental health organizations. At DCFS, he served as a bilingual follow-up worker in the Cook South Region. Other experience includes health and outreach education provided citywide to schools through the Chicago Department of Health. Jose worked for the Secretary of State's Office under Jim Edgar's community program where he received awards and certificates from the National Hotline for Missing and Exploited Children, Daley Junior College and Veterans of Foreign Wars. Jose holds a Bachelor's degree in Liberal Arts and Sciences from the University of Illinois at Chicago, with a major in Political Science and a minor in Latin American Studies. Jose also brings with him an array of experiences with hope and desire to make positive differences and influence others to do the same when taking on the challenge of working with the children and families we represent.



Joseph Becerra

Northern Region Administrator

Some may already know Joseph, as he has been a very active individual within the Department and the communities he serves. Joseph Becerra has been working in social services since 1979. Prior to coming to the department he worked in Kane County as a truant officer and juvenile probation officer. He has been working in Child Protection since 1997, most of which was as a supervisor, both in Aurora and Elgin. During the past 16 years Joseph has been on a variety of committees and ad hoc groups, mostly recently ending his term as chair of the statewide Hispanic Advisory Committee.

For the past 23 years, Joseph assisted in advocating for the provision of services to the Latino Community. He has served the Elgin area in different capacities including being a Commissioner for the city's Image Advisory Commission and in several task forces with the focus on Latino issues. His involvement has included the development of the Elgin Hispanic Network, Elgin Mediation Center and the Elgin Family Violence Enhanced Response Team (EFVERT) among others. Joseph was also the recipient of the 2001 Partners in Peace Award from the local domestic violence agency and the 2002 Bilingual Employee of the Year Award for the Department. He received his Bachelor's in Criminal Justice and MSW from Aurora University.

News From the Field

Meeting with IDCFS Director Bryan Samuels

Maria Ayala

On July 31, 2003, members of the Hispanic Advisory Committee met with new DCFS Director Bryan Samuels. The



purpose of the meeting was to welcome and introduce him to committee members, as well as address the challenges facing our Latino children and families. Of primary concern are Spanish-language services to our Latino children in residential care, the impact of SACWIS on the delivery of services and the recruitment and retention of bilingual staff. Each Sub-Committee also presented a report to provide the Director with an update of activities. The Director listened to our concerns and expressed his support for maintaining a relationship with the Hispanic Advisory Committee.

Cook North celebrates Hispanic Heritage Month

Miriam Mojica



luncheon for their co-workers in celebration of Hispanic Heritage Month. The luncheon was

designed to give the non-Latino staff a taste of traditional food from various Latin American countries. The event turned out to be a feast with food from Chile, Costa Rica, Cuba, Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico and Puerto Rico. It was a delight to see participants enjoying a plate of arroz con pollo with, among other dishes, lechon, gallitos de chorizo, mote, guacamole, and arroz con gandules.

The event was successfully planned and carried out within a few days, thanks to the generous Latino staff at Bradley Place and the comradeship of the invited guests. This celebration turned out to be more than just the sharing of food, but also a showing of Latino hospitality to friends and co-workers and the opportunity to fellowship among the staff. As news of this event traveled to other Cook North sites, administration congratulated the Latino staff at Bradley Place and suggested that this celebration be a region-wide event next year.

Summer Fest at Bradley Place a success!

Emely Nunez

On August 22, 2003, the DCFS office at Bradley place in Chicago held its first annual Summer Safety Fest. Everyone was invited to partake in this festival, including our foster families. Participants at the festival included the Cook County Illinois Sheriff's Department, who were checking the proper installation of car seats. The Sheriff's Department also held a "Run, Yell & Tell" program to teach kids safety techniques. The kids were treated to hot dogs, pizza, popcorn and face painting as well as a dance/song performance by the youth group "Fuerza Latina". Other presenters at this event included The Chicago Public Library, Amber Alert, CAPS, Sylvan Indentix Fingerprinting & Photos, Chicago Fire Department, Swedish Covenant Hospital Hispanic Nurse Society, Youth Campus Caregivers support, KIDS program, and The Cook North Youth Advisory Board. Thanks to everyone who contributed and participated in this event.

Child welfare in the Hispanic community

Vince Casillas



Petra Porras, Gorge Gonzalez de la Vega, Dr. Juan Garcia, Meg Goreki, Kenneth Martin Ocasion, Joseph Becerra and Carmen Alvarez

On September 19, 2003 the second phase of the "Child Welfare in the Hispanic Community" forum brought in over 100 participants to Geneva, Illinois. Highlighting the event sponsored by the IDCFS, Kane County

State's Attorney Office, The Consulate General of Mexico and Lifelink Latino Special Services Program, was a keynote address by Dr. Juan Garcia. The purpose of this forum was to educate community professionals on cultural issues impacting the Latino Community in Kane County. Additionally, there was a panel of experts who took various questions regarding child welfare topics. There was also valuable time devoted to work group discussions. The success of the forum is still being talked about and an exciting sense of purpose is driving the effort for a third phase sometime in 2004. For further information, contact Vince Casillas at (630) 521-823 or Kenneth Martin Ocasio at (630) 521-8065.

Latino foster care celebration

Dora Maya

On August 21, 2003, The DCFS/Latino Hispanic Community Network had a picnic with the Lake County Latino Foster Parents at Vernon Hills Century Park. The purpose of the picnic was to continue to strengthen the ties between foster parents, and to provide a forum for them to talk about their experiences. Arden Shore, Central Baptist, Catholic Charities, Lifelink foster parents

and their children participated in the event. DCFS staff also joined the celebration. Despite the sweltering heat, the parents and children had a great time, as they ate, played, socialized, and one more time they made a commitment to continue building their relationship. Thank you to the participating agencies for their donations.

The Lake County Foster Parent meetings occur quarterly. The next scheduled activity will be in January 6, 2003 to celebrate the Three Kings Day or "La Venida de los Reyes Magos." Hope to see you there. For more information, contact Jean Mani at (847) 249-7800.

Las Octavitas

Miriam Mojica

On January 17, 2003 the Hispanic Advisory Committee sponsored "Las Octavitas" for all DCFS Bilingual staff. The purpose of the activity was for staff to network, socialize and celebrate. The gathering promoted staff meeting each other and strengthening existing relationships. Over 75 bilingual employees participated. Some of the positive feedback received included:

"It is a great way to get our staff together to socialize and discuss 'what's going on' at our sites. I've been to all three and plan to be a regular."

"This activity provides the opportunity to fellowship with other bilingual workers from different DCFS offices and also the opportunity to network."

Next year's event will be held on January 16. Details will follow soon. If you are interested in participating on the planning committee for this annual event, please contact Miriam Mojica at (708) 338-6692.



Bilingual DCFS staff members network at Las Octavitas

Who is the Hispanic Advisory Committee?

The Hispanic Advisory Committee (HAC) is a committee that advises the Director regarding issues that the department faces concerning Hispanic families and children and subsequently makes recommendations to resolve these issues. HAC meets monthly and the Executive Committee meets with the Director on a quarterly basis. Additionally, HAC meets twice per year with the African-American Advisory Council to address joint issues, which impact our communities.

How are Members appointed?

Individuals who are interested in serving on HAC can nominate themselves or be nominated by someone else. Their immediate supervisor is contacted to ensure the individual will be allowed to participate fully in Committee and Sub-Committee meetings. Current HAC members hold elections for available positions during the February meeting. Terms are two years and members may be re-elected upon completion of their term. The makeup of the membership consists of Department staff and private Agency staff in accordance to the HAC By-laws.

HAC currently consists of the following sub-committees; Youth Services, Employee Issues, Newsletter, and Purchase of Service Agency Issues. Each sub-committee is composed of a chairperson, who is responsible for coordinating meetings to address and identify concerns and solutions to issues affecting the Hispanic families and children who fall within the parameters of their sub-committee. The subcommittee reports monthly to HAC on their progress, and the general committee votes on recommendations made by the sub-committee. Sub-committee members can request input of non-committee members to assist with projects. HAC and the African-American Advisory Council jointly developed a sub-committee to address incarcerated youth issues.

If you are interested in becoming a member of the Hispanic Advisory Committee, or would like to nominate someone, please contact Sylvia Fonseca at (312) 814-6800 or Victor M. Flores at (630) 790-6854.

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This Newsletter is brought to you by the Hispanic Advisory Committee and the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services.

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Newsletter Committee Members brainstorm for this issue of Noticias.

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